



STATE OF WASHINGTON
WASHINGTON STATE COUNCIL ON AGING
PO Box 45600 · Olympia, WA 98504-5600

April 18, 2023

The Honorable Jay Inslee, Governor
Office of the Governor
PO Box 40002
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Dear Governor Inslee,

The Washington State Council on Aging is expressing its very deep concern and requesting your action regarding Kaiser Permanente (KP) requiring changes to prescription refills. Notices have been sent and are being received informing KP enrollees that refills must be filled by mail order or at a Kaiser pharmacy only as of January 1, 2023. We believe this action is monopolistic and short sighted. It will cause major damage to local pharmacy providers in many areas of the state, especially rural areas. Many of the rural areas in our state, and many counties, don't have a Kaiser pharmacy. HB 1253 and SB 5213 would have addressed this issue, but both are now dead. We now ask you to take executive action to help seniors. Our members note the following issues affecting seniors and rural communities:

- 1) KP failed to fully inform insured members regarding the changes in prescription refill practices prior to the 2023-year enrollment period. We did not have the ability to voice our concerns about the impacts of this change until after the change was implemented.
- 2) KP's philosophy of wellness care extends to consultations with Registered Pharmacists. Having a Registered Pharmacist familiar with you and your family's medical history is essential to making sure the prescribed medication is effective and any adverse reactions or changes in the effectiveness of the medication are discussed when the prescription is refilled. With a local pharmacy, this relationship is enhanced. This relationship is diminished with required prescription refills.
- 3) Many medications are not amenable to a "mail-order refill" due to specific handling and storage requirements. Mail can be delayed by bad weather, accidents, and other postal issues. Such delays could be life threatening to certain individuals, especially diabetics and heart patients. KP's policy could cause seniors to travel long distances (30-60+ miles in some counties) to get a refill of critical medications; assuming the senior is able to and can afford to travel that distance.
- 4) KP's refill practice puts rural pharmacies in financial peril with the potential outcome of creating pharmacy deserts. Rural pharmacies rely on their local community members refilling prescriptions to stay in business. New prescriptions alone won't pay their bills. Along with the risk of pharmacy deserts, attracting and securing medical professionals to practice in rural areas of Washington State will be increasingly difficult if there isn't a local viable pharmacy.
- 5) KP has also failed to offer a secondary tier of prescription coverage when implementing this mandate. The only option is for KP members is to assume all cost for refills at a probable higher price than the KP negotiated benefit plan.

- 6) KP failed to inform participants of the location of contracted pharmacies. The only notification received was notification that refill information must be registered on your KP portal or use the phone number included.

We ask you, if possible, to resurrect SB 5213 or HB 1253 as KP's action will affect your state health care budget and likely state employee plans. If not, we ask you to work with Attorney General Ferguson to prohibit this monopolistic practice, which we believe will be and is very detrimental to health care in our rural areas. If prohibiting the practice is not an option at this time, we ask you establish a moratorium on KP's policy prohibiting refilling prescriptions at the local pharmacy through the 2023 insurance year and then develop policy or legislation to address the issue over the long term and protect our access to local and rural pharmacies.

Ensuring access to local Registered Pharmacists promotes the health and wellness of rural KP senior enrollees and ensures rural pharmacies and medical practices can and will continue to meet the needs of all rural Washington residents.

Sincerely,



Kathy Medford, Chair
Washington State Council on Aging

Michele Blythe, Legislative Committee Co-Chair
Association of Washington Cities

Gavin Carmichael, Council Member
Agency on Aging & Disabilities of Southwest WA
Advisory Council

Sharon Curley, Council Member
At-Large Western WA

Bruce Dougherty, Council Member
Pierce County ADR Advisory Board

Georgiann Dustin, Council Member
Northwest Senior Services Board

Michele Horaney, Public Outreach & Education
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Lewis-Mason-Thurston AAA Advisory Council

Susan Kerr, Council Member
Kitsap County AAA Advisory Council

Karen Kiessling, Vice-Chair
At-Large Eastern WA

Jean Kindem, Council Member
At-Large Eastern WA

Deb Murphy, Council Member
Aging and Adult Care of Central WA Advisory
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Bob Scarfo, Council Member
Aging & LTC of Eastern WA Planning and
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Art Swannack, Legislative Committee Co-Chair
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Dennis Wheeler, Council Member
Snohomish County Council on Aging